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## Veiling Studies and Globalization Studies

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## **25. Veiling Studies and Globalization Studies**

David Inglis and Anna-Mari Almila

As this handbook amply demonstrates, the range and variety of veiling practices across the world is partly matched by the number and diversity of different sorts of scholar and analyst who work on veiling matters. The field of veiling studies has grown exponentially over the last few decades, encompassing forms of analyses from a broad range of disciplinary perspectives. But the apparent variety also tends to occlude the gaps and absences in the field. Works by individual scholars often tend to be of the case study type, examining in detail the micro-level practices of particular groups in specific locations. Of course, such analyses are absolutely vital for the purposes of understanding the nuances and subtleties of veiling activities and the sense made of them by particular people. But the case study approach too often remains rather unconnected to more systematic, long-term, historical and macro-level ways of thinking (for recent notable exceptions, see e.g. Ahmed 1996; 2011), and it is precisely these frameworks that now need to be brought much more into the field of veiling studies, so that they may more rigorously inform case study material in the future and locate specific veiling practices within much broader geographical and historical contexts than they often hitherto have been placed. This way the field can further push the wider approaches and historical considerations that only some scholars have hitherto engaged with.

A related problem is that edited books and special editions of journals have tended towards a regional focus, dealing with, for example, veiling in Europe (e.g. Ferrari and Pastorelli 2013), Euramerica (e.g. Tarlo and Moors 2013), or Africa (e.g. Renne 2013), rather than taking a broader comparative perspective and locating their objects of analysis within large-scale social processes that can be conventionally called the phenomena of globalization. When issues to do with globalization are mentioned, it is often in a rather rudimentary manner, and the insights to

be gleaned from globalization theory and the field of globalization studies go relatively untapped. Therefore we suggest that what is needed is a much more systematic interpenetration of the concerns of veiling studies with those of globalization studies. Scholars of veiling would find many useful concepts, ideas and analytical orientations within the realm of globalization analyses. That field itself is highly diverse, and some of the most intellectually satisfying paradigms within it are drawn from the disciplines of history and historical sociology. The contribution of these disciplines and sub-disciplines to the understanding of globalization rests partly in their capacity to connect the micro-level world of actors' experiences and actions together with the macro-level dynamics of globalizing processes, networks, institutions and structures. This is precisely the micro-macro linkage that veiling studies now needs to develop more. Therefore what we call for here is not simply that theories of globalization be utilised more in the understanding of veiling practices, for that is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the intellectual enlargement of the field. Instead, what we are calling for is a more fruitful and deep engagement between veiling scholars and those, like historical sociologists, who have at their disposal a wide range of ways of understanding what globalization is, that go well beyond often glib assertions of more presentist and simplistic accounts of globalization (Inglis, 2014).

It is inevitable that any sophisticated understanding of globalization is dependent upon an equally nuanced conception of modernity. It would seem impossible to understand any aspect of social reality, including veiling, without a sophisticated understanding of what the terms 'modern' and 'modernity' mean, both at the level of scholarly analysis and at the level of people's experiences, understandings and political orientations. A crucial step for veiling studies is to avoid simplification and reification of those terms, precisely the point raised by historical sociologists and others when they address the broader social sciences. Some scholars have indeed already embarked on this kind of work (e.g. Göle 1996; 2003). It is clear that

political discourses and ideologies tend towards radical simplifications of what 'modern' and 'modernity' connote, heralding them either as wonderful achievements and conditions to be aspired to, or as disastrous innovations that need to be contested, avoided or destroyed. The modern/anti-modern dyad structures much of contemporary political discourse around the world, and has done so for several hundred years, a situation ripe with multiple contradictions. Those who denounce modernity most vehemently are themselves products of conditions that others would easily call 'modern'. Tradition, heritage and orthodoxy are invoked precisely when perceived modernity is felt to be encroaching on particular lifeworlds and lifestyles, and new traditions are invented as a consequence, and presented as solutions to a felt sense of danger and crisis (Castells 2009). Veiling practices and the discourses surrounding them of course have to be located within these sorts of dynamics. But beyond that, the analyst must operate with a sense of the complexities of what the modern and modernity are or can be construed as being. Is there one modernity or multiple kinds? If the latter, what are the factors that create different sorts of modernities? What factors unite and are common to different versions of modernity? The historical sociological literature on multiple modernities tends to focus on different national forms of modernity (Eisenstadt 2000), for example examining the similarities and differences, and indeed empirical cross-border connections, between the French version of the modern and the Turkish variety. That veils and veiling are hugely important in both national contexts, illustrates the need for analysis of veiling to be very sensitive to the multiplicitous forms of modernity that exist within particular national spaces.

Scholars also need to pay attention to how particular discourses about modernity, which in turn lead to programmes of institution building as regards both the state and civil society, have travelled from one national site to another. Thus, for example, Turkish modernity is in part constituted out of discursive and institutional elements that primarily began in France and then were taken up by Turkish elites after WWI. So it is not just that there are different national

versions of modernity, but also that they have influenced each other in ongoing processes of emulation, imitation and hybridization carried out mostly, but not exclusively, by political and economic elites. Within each particular national form of modernity, there have come to exist complex but structured relations between the state and its institutions, religion and its institutional manifestations, the domestic sphere, the gendered division of labour and civil society. Veiling practices have to be located within these complex contexts, and those contexts themselves have to be understood over long periods of development. Additionally, those periods themselves have to be analysed in terms not only of the creation of national social spaces, but also in terms of how those spaces were themselves created through complicated cross-border and transnational dynamics. In essence, if a comprehensive picture is to be gained, veiling has to be understood against very complex historical and institutional backgrounds, which only an inter- and trans-disciplinary approach can begin to grasp. How veiling is thought of, and the means by which it is practiced, are very much informed by the complex of conditions that have arisen within particular national territories and the forms of modernity they have entailed.

But veiling also has much to do with social and political dynamics that both transcend the borders erected through processes of state and nation creation, and also sometimes involve counter-movements that seek to challenge or disrupt the state and nation-building activities of elites. In other words, veiling must be seen as being informed both by the creation of national spaces and modernities, and also movements ranged against them. National projects have unintentionally led to and fostered the creation of trans-national counter-projects, the most spectacular case in our period being that of radical Islamism. Veiling exists at the intersection between these two great sets of processes, each of which encompasses particular ideologies, affectivities and calls to mobilize millions of people (Roy 2004). Such processes can only be

adequately understood within the sorts of global frames of reference developed by historical sociologists and cognate others.

These sorts of reflections take us in terms of intellectual complexity and depth well beyond any tendencies towards superficial appropriations of concerns from globalization studies into veiling studies. Much of the scholarly literature on veiling rightly deals with trans-national connections, and indeed it is difficult to see how it could ignore them, when, for example, it is so obvious that veiling practices in Germany are highly influenced by those in Turkey, given the large-scale migration that has occurred between the two countries over the last several decades. But such trans-national connections are still too rarely thought about in terms of globalization theory and wider globalization dynamics. The oft-used case study approach notes some phenomena of cross-border movement, but it does not go far enough. It needs to consider particular forms of mobility – of people and objects of various sorts - within a much broader, planetary level of movement across borders, the multiple strands of which have been occurring over the last five hundred years (Urry 2007). Only within that much wider context can more specific practices be adequately located and understood.

It is a very noteworthy feature of the field of veiling studies that particular investigations offered by different scholars from around the world tend to converge around common findings as regards how women talk about veiling and how they understand what they are doing when they veil. Women in very different geographical, cultural and religious contexts tend to say the same sorts of things and offer the same sorts of justifications for why they veil. These have been noted as ‘stock responses’, for example in early studies of veiling in Egypt (El Guindi 1999, see also Ahmed 2011), and the same sorts of responses certainly circulate more globally too (see Chapter 1). Yet it is not enough simply to note on a piecemeal basis that understandings of veiling are often very similar in particular countries. Rather, the important thing is to be aware of more global similarities, and to account for the complex reasons as to why they have

come to exist. Only a more global analytic perspective can identify such phenomena and account for the reasons for their genesis. Such an analytic framework looks not only at particular forms of migration and inter-cultural influence, but also locates those within the broader planet-spanning processes of globalization that have been occurring for the last half millennium (Holton 2005). Therefore simply comparing particular national experiences of veiling is insufficient, as is just looking at particular forms of migration and movement in isolation from much broader patterns that have structured the entire world over the last several centuries. A more global, or truly cosmopolitan, frame of reference is needed to understand more specific and micro-level practices in their entirety (Beck 1999).

The points we have just made are ultimately to do with the problems attendant upon particular scholarly divisions of labour and the need to reconfigure them in more helpful directions. This applies not just at the level of the general relationship between veiling studies and globalization studies, but also at the level of the division of labour within veiling studies itself. Different sorts of specialists do refer to each other's works, but often in rather limited ways. For example, those who study veiling as fashion do refer to, and to some extent draw upon, the analyses offered by those who look at the political phenomena associated with veiling (e.g. Lewis 2015, see also Lewis 1999). But the structures of intellectual production often prevent a fuller interpenetration of ideas and insights drawn from each subfield. Thus edited books on veiling and fashion tend to focus on the fashion elements and give only a sketchy sense of the politics, while conversely books and special editions of journals oriented to politics tend to refer to fashion phenomena only in passing, when they do so at all. In this way, the totality of veiling is underplayed or lost altogether. This is another reason for drawing upon globalization studies, especially its more historically informed wings, for it has been the aim of the latter to try to think through how the political, cultural, social and economic aspects of globalization fit together in multiple and shifting ways. There are not just many different theories of

globalization, it is also the case that there are multiple *globalizations* (or forms of globalization), ranging across every dimension of human existence, from the most material to the most ethereal. Those different forms of globalization operate at multiple levels and scales (Brenner 1999), and it is precisely these that veiling studies would benefit from attending to more. The most impressive works in globalization studies are able to model how, for example, the aesthetic and political dimensions of globalization have been articulated in varying but recurring manners (Holton 2005; Axford 2013). Indeed, the whole point of studying globalization is to seek to understand the complex but patterned interplay of all dimensions of human life, and to refuse to isolate particular realms of human practice from each other. In that sense, globalization theory is a very important contribution to general social theory, because the latter is an attempt to build ways of understanding all the various facets of human existence considered together and not partitioned off into different discipline-based forms of expertise. That is why globalization studies and theory can be so useful for veiling studies scholars, because they provide resources to connect social spheres and sets of phenomena that are currently dealt with in ways that sequester them more than connect them. Globalization theory, as a form of general social theory, attempts to create synoptic visions of how the world works in all its manifold complexity, and the complexities of veiling can only be fully grasped when such synoptic visions are used and indeed are further developed through thinking about veiling. Therefore it is not just that globalization theory holds out the promise of more joined-up thinking in veiling studies, it is also the case that the application of such theory to veiling matters will help extend the analytical reach of the theory itself, deepening its grasp of the interpenetration of such factors as religion, fashion, aesthetics, and identity. If there is one undoubted quality common to all forms of veils and veiling, it is their extraordinary multiplicity, and that quality is also true of the vast range of phenomena that we can put under the heading of ‘globalization’. That is why the two fields of study should now come into much



more systematic dialogue with each other, for the multifariousness of each can productively inform the comprehension of the other.

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